

# Lifestyle

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Brazilian model Alessandra Ambrosio arrives for the screening of the film 'The Dead Don't Die' during the 72nd edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

## Keanu Reeves sinks hands, feet at Hollywood's Chinese Theatre



Actor Keanu Reeves signed his name and sunk his hands and feet in fresh cement Tuesday in front of the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. More than 30 years have passed since the star of "The Matrix," "Speed" and "Point Break" tried his luck by taking his car from Toronto to Hollywood to become an actor. "It is a great honor to be here and to be invited to this remarkable, historical, magical place," Reeves told a crowd gathered for the ceremony at the Chinese Theatre.

"To be included among all of the incredible artists who have made their mark here over the past 92 years, to be a part of this Hollywood tradition started by Sid Grauman all those years ago and which continues to this day, I thank you. Thank you very much." Born in Lebanon's capital Beirut in 1964 but raised in New York and Toronto, Reeves left high school to become an actor. He came to Hollywood in 1986 to work on the film "Youngblood," also starring Rob Lowe.

Reeves rose to fame with "Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure" and its sequel, but is best known for his role as Neo in "The Matrix" trilogy. Friday will see the release of his latest starring role, in another trilogy, "John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum." Laurence Fishburne, who played the role of Reeves's mentor Morpheus in "The Matrix" and also appears in the upcoming "John Wick" film, called Reeves one of the "smartest and most intelligent men that I have ever met."

"After being in the public eye for so many years, he has somehow managed to maintain more than a little bit of mystery, which is really cool," Fishburne said at the Hollywood ceremony. "He is a deeply sensitive and thoughtful person, and he is also a courageous and passionate artist." Reeves' marks in front of the Chinese Theatre come after he received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2005.—AFP

## Curtains for 'The Big Bang Theory,' unlikely ratings giant

Peopled by sometimes-awkward geeks making physics references, "The Big Bang Theory," whose finale episode airs today, seemed destined at first to appeal to a niche audience. But as the show reaches its conclusion, it has become one of the most-watched series in the world. Focused on whether characters Sheldon Cooper and Amy Farrah-Fowler will win the Nobel prize, the show is going out on top as it wraps up its 12th and final season.

The show, which airs on US network CBS, has carved its place at the top of American television, with more than 12 million live viewers for much of the most-recent season (17 million when including delayed watchers) — similar levels to "Game of Thrones." According to research firm Parrot, "Big Bang" was one of the five most popular shows in the world last year, a streak CBS would have been happy to continue were it not for Sheldon actor Jim Parsons having announced he would leave the show after the 12th season.

For producer and writer Stephen Engel, who worked on it at the beginning of its run, "Big Bang" owes much of its success to the annoying-but-lovable character. "It was a serendipitous blending of a character and an actor that was just magic," he told AFP. Depicting a brilliant scientist who is socially clueless, Sheldon's portrayal was "just a perfect marriage of point of view, jokes, voice and actor that made that character jump off the screen," Engel said.

### Rise of geek culture

But Sheldon's charm alone can't explain how a series that wasn't critically acclaimed or even breaking into the top 50 most-popular at the

end of its first season went on to run longer than American sitcom classics like "Friends," "The Cosby Show" and "Seinfeld." According to conventional wisdom, it was "The Big Bang Theory"'s depiction of characters like Sheldon, Leonard, Howard and Raj as proud geeks-obsessed with TV series, video games and obscure sub-genre interests—that allowed for its longevity.

Long associated with niche interests, geek, or nerd, culture has made its way into the mainstream, thanks to sagas like "The Lord of the Rings," "Star Wars," "Game of Thrones" and others, meaning there was a growing audience that could feel an affinity with "The Big Bang Theory"'s characters. "There was a tendency in the wake of 'Friends' to just to put as many good looking people in a room as possible and just hope people would look at them and just want to watch the show. 'Big Bang Theory' just decided because they were nerds, we can get the funniest actors we can find," Engel said. "They don't have to be handsome."

### The end of the sitcom?

Though "The Big Bang Theory" differs from most shows in its popularity and subject matter, the series still relies on a variety of tried-and-true sitcom conventions: the episodes, shot on multiple cameras, are made up of a series of punchlines interspersed by a laugh track, some of it edited in later (the show is filmed in front of a studio audience). The end of the series, which coincides with the end of ABC's "Modern Family," which will finish with its 11th season next year, marks the end of an era for the genre.

Sitcoms on traditional networks, such as "Big

Bang" spin-off "Young Sheldon," and "Mom," also the work of "Big Bang" creator Chuck Lorre, just don't bring in the same audience numbers. And Netflix has tried its hand at the format, with "Fuller House" and "One Day at a Time," though neither will be returning after the end of the year. By 2020, the classic sitcom will be absent from nearly every major streaming platform, including Amazon and Hulu.

"I've lived in many periods in this business where people have said: the sitcom is dying," said Stan Zimmerman, who worked on "Roseanne" as a producer and writer. "And then it somehow comes roaring back." Coupled with the decline of the traditional sitcom, the fragmentation of audiences means there is concern that universal series, capable of capturing the attention of large swaths of the public, like "The Big Bang Theory" or even "Game of Thrones" was able to do, is gone.

"I think it's wonderful that we are being so diverse in the programming and the voices that we are hearing and we just need to have more of that," said Zimmerman, who is working on a show called "Silver Foxes," a comedy centered on aging gay men. But he says he wouldn't count out water-cooler series just yet. "There's still room for a big, general-audience show that everybody could sit and watch and laugh and talk about the next day at work," he said. "There's room for everything now." — AFP



In this file photo the cast from the television comedy series 'The Big Bang Theory', from left, Johnny Galecki, Jim Parsons, Kaley Cuoco, Simon Helberg, Kunal Nayyar, Mayim Bialik and Melissa Rauch, place their hands into two blocks of cement at a Handprint Ceremony at the TCL Chinese Theater in Hollywood, California. — AFP